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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 002434

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TW](#)
SUBJECT: BLUE AND GREEN ACADEMICS ON CROSS-STRAIT,
PRESIDENTIAL RACE, REFERENDA

Classified By: AIT Director Stephen M. Young, Reason(s): 1.4 (B/D).

¶1. (C) Beijing is deeply suspicious of President Chen, DPP presidential candidate Frank Hsieh and other "Taiwanese" leaders, but would try to work with Hsieh if he wins the presidency, a group of academics told the Director October 29. They claimed President Chen is promoting the DPP UN referendum to preserve his own political power, not to help Hsieh get elected. Combining the presidential and UN referenda ballots, as Chen has proposed, could significantly increase chances that one or both UN referenda could pass. U.S. objections to the DPP UN referendum have caused Taiwan's undecided voters to think twice out of concern that its passage would damage cross-Straits relations. KMT presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou enjoys a comfortable lead in opinion polls now, but the last two months of the campaign will decide the winner. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The Director hosted a luncheon for four Taiwan academics on October 29. Professors HSU Yung-ming (Soochow University) and SHIH Cheng-feng (Tamkang University) are affiliated with the DPP's Taiwan Thinktank, and Hsu is a frequent guest on a pro-Green television talk show. Professors Edward CHEN (Tamkang University) and Spencer YANG (Chinese Culture University) both regularly contribute articles critical of President Chen and the DPP to blue-leaning newspapers. The Deputy Director also attended.

CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS

¶3. (C) Professors Chen and Yang agreed that if Hsieh is elected, Beijing will not ignore him as it did President Chen, and would probably be willing to work with him to improve the cross-Straits relationship. Yang argued that Hsieh has tried to signal his "pragmatism" to Beijing by remaining silent when President Chen verbally attacks China, but acknowledged that Beijing might interpret Hsieh's silence as agreement, not dissent. Prof. Hsu asserted that President Chen, Hsieh, and others in the DPP often use academics and other intermediaries to communicate with Beijing, to reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings. But, after seven years of President Chen's rhetorical tricks, Prof. Yang added, Beijing is deeply suspicious of "Taiwanese" DPP leaders, who have no desire for unification or even friendly relations with China. Beijing finds it easier to trust KMT leaders, who still "identify" with China. If elected, Yang predicted,

Hsieh will have to overcome this prejudice before cross-Strait progress can be made.

DPP POLITICS

14. (C) Hsieh's pragmatism has also led him to try to improve his relationship with President Chen, and Chen has reciprocated, argued Yang. Despite his previously lukewarm support for the DPP UN referendum, Hsieh has embraced the DPP's UN referendum and recently challenged Ma to publicly debate the issue, an invitation which Ma thus far has declined. In return, President Chen arranged a meeting between Hsieh and senior leaders of a number of pro-independence groups, a move intended to strengthen support for Hsieh among deep-Greens skeptical of Hsieh's independence bona fides.

15. (C) Despite warming relations between President Chen and Hsieh, Prof. Yang maintained, Chen is actually less concerned about a Hsieh presidential victory than he is about maintaining his political influence once out of office. Chen's recent push to put the UN referenda and presidential vote on the same ballot has not been calculated to draw more Green voters to the polls, although it might have that effect. Instead, Yang argued, Chen's objective is to increase chances that the DPP referendum itself will pass, which would be an enormous political victory for Chen and would guarantee his stature within the party, and perhaps help protect him from corruption charges. If Hsieh is elected, Prof. Shih opined, Chen could also try to use his political clout to force Hsieh to pursue additional "pro-independence" referenda during his term.

TAIPEI 00002434 002 OF 002

REFERENDUM ISSUES

16. (C) Prof. Hsu predicted a combined ballot would dramatically increase chances of one or both UN referenda passing. If everyone who takes a ballot to vote for president is considered to have "participated" in the referendum voting process, one or both referenda would likely meet the 50 percent participation threshold required by the referendum statute. (Note: Voter turnout for presidential elections usually exceeds 80 percent. End note.) Prof. Chen explained that if the CEC acceded to KMT demands to use the "two-step" voting procedure used for the 2004 "missile defense" referendum, voters would vote only on the referendum endorsed by their preferred party, likely keeping both referenda from reaching the 50 percent participation threshold required for a "valid" referendum. Prof. Hsu disagreed, however, countering that with its own referendum on the ballot, the KMT can't credibly direct Blue voters to boycott the referendum vote like it did in 2004. KMT voters could disregard party instructions and vote in favor of both referenda, and not just the KMT version.

17. (C) Prof. Shih told the Director recent U.S. opposition to the DPP referendum had only strengthened deep-Green support for President Chen and the referendum itself. Prof. Chen disagreed, arguing that DAS Christensen's remarks struck just the right tone, respectful of Taiwan's democracy while pointing out the risks to cross-Strait stability posed by the DPP referendum. After DAS Christensen's speech, Taiwan voters no longer view the UN referenda as a domestic internal affair without international repercussions, added Prof. Yang, and this has somewhat reduced public support for both UN referenda.

PRESIDENTIAL RACE

18. (C) Prof. Shih predicted that Hsieh in the coming months would echo Ma's policies on cross-Strait relations and the

economy, in an effort to "muddy the waters" and force voters to make a decision based on the "character" of the respective candidates. (Note: Hsieh and vice presidential running mate Su Tseng-chang are widely considered to be highly effective administrators, while Ma has often been criticized as a detached and ineffectual leader. End note.) Prof. Shih also insisted "ethnic identity" remained the most important issue in the campaign. Prof. Hsu agreed, arguing that Ma's central campaign themes -- the economy and anti-corruption -- had become stale. Ma must find a new issue to prevent "ethnic identity" from becoming the deciding factor in the race. Not true, countered Prof. Yang, who claimed that voters are tired of the "ethnic debate" and would cross ethnic lines to vote for the most competent candidate. All four academics, however, agreed that the presidential race would be decided based on events during the last two months of the campaign, and that polling results before then would be largely meaningless.

YOUNG